DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 382 910 CG 026 251

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TITLE A Comparison of the Hispanic Dropout and Non-Dropout between the 8th and 10th Grades.
PUB DATE Nov 94
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midsouth Educational Research Association (Nashville, TN, November 9-12, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Failure; Adolescents; At Risk Persons; *Dropout Attitudes; *Dropout Characteristics; *Dropouts; Grade 8; Grade 10; *High Risk Students; *Hispanic Americans; Longitudinal Studies; Potential Dropouts; Secondary Education; Student Attrition; Withdrawal (Education)
IDENTIFIERS *Hispanic American Students

ABSTRACT

Recent census figures indicate that, compared to all races and ethnic groups, Hispanic students had the lowest rate of graduation from high school. This article explores possible predictors of dropout among Hispanic youth by comparing the Hispanic youth who dropped out of school between the 8th and 10th grade with those who continued. Data for the study came from the base year (1988) and the first follow-up (1990) of the National Longitudinal Study of Eighth Graders. Out of almost 25,000 8th graders tested in 1988, 3,171 were identified as Hispanic. In addition to performance on standardized achievement tests, a variety of individual, school, and family-level variables were also available. Preliminary descriptive analyses indicated that the dropout sample was different from the rest of the Hispanic youth in their attitudes towards school while in the 8th grade. The dropout sample also featured a lowered sense of efficacy, lower self-esteem, and lower educational aspirations in the 8th grade than did continuing students. They also felt less safe at school. Likewise, the dropout sample had lower scores on standardized tests. It is recommended that opportunities be provided for creating positive self-perceptions in minority youth, especially in academic areas. (RJM)

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ED 382 910

A COMPARISON OF THE HISPANIC DROPOUT AND NON DROPOUT BETWEEN THE 8TH AND 10TH GRADES

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Paper Presented at the Annual Convention of the Midsouth Educational Research Association, Nashville, November, 1994.

CG026251

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Abstract

The main objective of this study was to explore possible predictors of dropout among Hispanic youth by comparing the Hispanic youth that dropped out of school between the 8th and 10th grade with those who continued. Data for the study came from the base year (1988) and the first follow-up (1990)of the National Education Longitudinal Study of Eighth Graders. Out of almost 25,000 Eighth-graders who were tested in 1988, 3,171 were identified as Hispanic. The sample was followed-up two years later in 10th grade. In addition to their performance on standardized achievement tests, a variety of individual, school, and family-level variables were also available. Preliminary descriptive analyses indicated that the dropout sample was different from the rest of the Hispanic youth in 8th grade attitudes towards school. The dropout sample also had smaller sense of efficacy, smaller self-esteem, and lower educational aspirations in the eighth grade. As expected, the dropout sample had lower scores on the standardized tests (Math, Science, Reading) in the eighth grade. Policy implications of the results for the programs that deal with these at-risk youth are discussed.

Hispanics form both one of the oldest and one of the most recent groups of immigrants in the United States. According to the National Census Bureau, Hispanics comprise 22.4 million or 11% of the total U.S. population. It is generally agreed-upon that they are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States. It is projected that by the year 2000, they will be the most populous minority group in the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990). This population growth will undoubtedly put a tremendous demand on the educational system to accommodate to the increasing diversity of the student body. It is estimated that by 1995, the population of Hispanic students will grow by more than 54% (Steward, 1991). For a variety of reasons, a considerable proportion of these children will meet the criteria of being at-risk (see Garcia, 1992).

The 1991 census indicated that Hispanic students had the lowest rate of graduation from High School among all races and ethnic groups. Hispanic students showed a 40% non graduation rate, a 35% grade retention rate, and two to four grade level achievement gap. According to Jaramillo (1985), the median number of school years for Hispanics 25 years or older is 10.3 years as compared to 11.9 years of Blacks and 12.5 years for non-Hispanic Whites. Garcia (1992) presented data indicating that 40% of all Hispanic students leave school before graduation. Among those who drop out of school, 40% do so before the 10th grade. Of those who continue their schooling, 47% are over-aged when they are in 12th grade.

Given the severity of these problems facing the Hispanic children and youth, it is necessary to find out how educational policies can change to help alleviate these problems. Without a detailed picture of the Hispanic children/adolescents who stay in school versus those who leave school, and those who are academically successful versus those who face repeated failures, such educational policy changes can not be achieved. We need to identify the individual and school related variables that are related to achievement of these youth. The main goal of the present study is to compare those Hispanic students that drop out or stay in school, and what variables predict which students are more likely to leave school before graduation by following-up a national sample of Hispanic 8th graders who were studied in the National Longitudinal Study 1988 project.

Suzuki (1987), suggests that to retain Hispanics in school, and to achieve higher graduation rates, it is necessary to create special educational programs and curricula, provide opportunities for academic success, foster cooperation among students, create awareness of cultural and language differences, and increase sensitivity to cultural diversity among teachers and other school personnel. Hispanic students themselves need emotional- psychological support, study skills development, and facilitation of the transition from High School to College (Gonzalez, 1992). Similar to other populations with limited English Proficiency (Park and Tashakkori, 1993), English proficiency seems to play an important role

in Hispanic students' success.

Method

Sample: Data for this study came from the base year of the National Longitudinal Study 1988 project. In 1988, a random sample of 1,734 schools was selected from a national pool of approximately 39,000 schools with 8th graders. The final sample consisted of 1,037 schools who agreed to participate, and actually participated in the study (see Ingles et al, 1992 for more details). Eighth-graders in these schools responded to questionnaires that measured a wide variety of variables. Out of approximately 25,000 students who were tested in 1988, more than 3000 students were identified as Hispanic. The 8th-grade (1988) and the first (1990) follow-up data is used for the present study. Those who dropped out of the school were followed up two years later.

Variables: Data regarding school, family, and individual level variables was used. In addition, data regarding educational intentions, school problems, attitudes towards school self perceptions, academic achievement in Math, Science, and Reading were used which were theoretically expected to affect academic achievement. For those students who dropped out, detailed data is available regarding possible reasons for dropping out.

Results

The purpose of this study was to compare the Hispanic dropout and non-dropout utilizing variables through which predictions could be made in identifying

those Hispanics that drop out of school and those that stay in school. Table 1 presents the mean achievement scores on standardized tests for the drop-out and non-dropout youth. Table 1 also presents the difference between the means of the two groups within males and females. As can be seen in that table, the drop-out sample had consistently lower means on all three achievement indicators. The difference between the two groups was greater among males than among females, especially in Math and Science. Also, male drop-out group had the smallest mean achievement scores than all other groups, including the female drop-outs.

*** Table 1 about here ***

Table 2 presents the Hispanic students' self-related perceptions. Although the drop-out students perceived themselves to be slightly more popular than the others, their overall self-esteem was lower in 8th grade. Also, they had lower sense of efficacy. In addition, as Table 2 shows, the drop-out group had less internal attributions of control than non-drop-outs. Obviously, the would-be dropout Hispanic youth show a different profile of self-perceptions in the 8th-grade than others.

*** Table 2 about here ***

Table 3 presents the student's reports of some of the problems they had in school in 8th grade. As that table shows, parents of male would-be dropouts received greater warning about students' mis-behavior in 8th grade. The students that drops out of school later were more likely to be sent to the office due to

school work problems. Also, the would-be dropout males were more likely to be sent to the office for fighting in school.

Conclusions

The main objective of the present investigation was to present a 'profile' of the Hispanic youth who drop out of the school between the 8th and 10th grade. The first, expected, attribute of the drop-out groups was that they did poorly in Math, Science, and Reading in the 8th grade. This was specifically true for drop-out males. These were along with relatively negative attitudes towards classes, and a history of previous failure. We found that 14% of dropouts, compared to 8% of the others reported usually coming to class without homework. 44% of dropouts, as compared to 17% of non-dropouts stated that they felt bored at school most of the time. 57% of the dropouts, as compared to 19% of others reported that they were held back a grade.

Furthermore, 15% of drop-outs, as compared to 20% of others, strongly agreed that they usually look forward to Science classes. Strong agreement with the same statement regarding Math classes was expressed by 16% of drop-outs and 18% of others. 13% of drop-outs, as compared to 9% of others reported attending remedial Math at least once a week.

In some respects, the two groups were quite similar. For example, in both groups, a small proportion (2% and 3%, respectively) reported doing more than 3 hours of Science homework per week. The same was true about Math homework

(2% of drop-out group, 5% of others). Responses to a question regarding being afraid to ask questions in Math and Science classes did not differentiate the two groups either (7% and 5% for Math, 18% and 16% for Science).

Among variables that differentiate the two groups one was feeling unsafe at school. 21% of dropouts, as compared to 9% of others, reported that they felt unsafe at school. Reports of weapons at school was not, however, different across the two groups (12% and 13%, respectively). Another distinguishing area was the self-perceptions. As discussed before, the Hispanic youth had lower self-esteem and sense of efficacy. It is not possible, at this time, to make conclusions regarding the relative importance of these factors in determining the decision to drop out of school. However, since these self-perceptions are good targets for preventive programs, they should be considered important. Providing opportunities for creation of positive self-perceptions in minority youth, especially in academic areas (see Tashakkori, 1993 for a discussion) might prove to be a fruitful preventive strategy.

Providing opportunities for these youth to engage in activities that are more interesting and rewarding will also lead to a reduction of the degree of boredom. In line with the results of the present study, our anecdotal classroom observations, and numerous interviews with Hispanic youth and their teachers point to the importance of boredom in reducing the motivation to remain at school. Innovating teaching techniques (group projects, for example, as compared to lecture) can help.

As a matter of fact, only if education is perceived to be relevant, interesting, and useful it creates the motivation to learn. This is not the way many minority youth perceive schooling. Preventive efforts should concentrate on changing these attitudes.

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Table 1. Mean (M) and the Standard Deviation (SD) for the test score of the drop-out and non-dropout Hispanic youth in different academic areas

Variables		Female			Male		
		Non Drop	Drop	D*	Non Drop	Drop	D*
Reading	M	47.37	41.61	5.76	46.19	40.24	5.95
	SD	9.16	8.09		9.27	6.23	
Math	M	45.80	41.61	4.19	47.16	39.89	7.27
	SD	8.63	6.69		9.04	5.77	
Science	M	45.82	41.55	4.27	47.53	40.26	7.26
	SD	8.29	7.66		9.44	7.05	

D* = Difference between the means of the two groups

Table 2. Mean (M) and the Standard Deviation (SD) for different indicators of self-esteem and locus of control and self-efficacy of the drop-out and non-dropout Hispanic youth in different academic areas Self-Perceptions

Variables		Female			Male		
		Non Drop	Drop	D*	Non Drop	Drop	D*
Perceived Popularity	M	1.91	2.00	.90	2.00	2.05	.50
	SD	.60	.59		.61	.61	
Self-efficacy	M	2.88	2.66	.22	2.95	2.75	.20
	SD	.56	.55		.54	.51	
Chance and luck not important in life	M	2.44	2.17	.27	2.62	2.10	.52
	SD	.94	.86		.94	.90	
Feel useless at times	M	2.44	2.35	.09	2.62	2.46	.16
	SD	.82	.81		.84	.82	
At times I feel I am not I good at all	M	2.55	2.35	.20	2.90	2.60	.30
	SD	.91	.86		.88	.84	
On the whole, I am satisfied with myself	M	3.13	3.12	.01	3.24	3.08	.16
	SD	.73	.65		.67	.70	

D* = Differences

Table 3. Mean (M) and the Standard Deviation (SD) for different reports of school problems of the drop-out and non-dropout Hispanic youth in different academic areas Self-Perceptions

Variables		Female			Male		
		Non Drop	Drop	D*	Non Drop	Drop	D*
Parents received warning about misbehavior	M	.19	.35	.16	.42	.64	.22
	SD	.48	.66		.65	.75	
Sent to office for school problems	M	.11	.23	.12	.22	.42	.20
	SD	.37	.53		.51	.58	
Got into fight with other students at school	M	.16	.39	.23	.38	.64	.26
	SD	.43	.66		.62	.79	
Sent to office for misbehavior	M	.28	.62	.34	.59	.91	.32
	SD	.57	.79		.72	.81	

D* = Differences